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ABSTRACT

In 1997, Florida's St. Petersburg Junior College (SPJC) conducted a study to determine whether students who needed remediation completed their degree programs and, if so, the time that they took to complete their program. The academic records of students who graduated in summer 1995, fall 1995, and spring 1996 were analyzed, with findings compared to a similar, September 1991 study of graduates from summer 1990, fall 1990, and spring 1991. Study findings included the following: (1) 2,652 graduates received associate degrees in 1995-96, down from 2,745 in 1990-91; (2) 53.3% of the 1995-96 graduates had enrolled in one or more college preparatory class during their tenure at SPJC, compared to only 43.1% of the 1990-91 graduates; (3) for all 1995-96 graduates, 59.4% (n=1,576) completed the degree requirements in 9 semesters or fewer, compared to 75.3% of those who did not require remedial classes and 45.5% of those who did; (4) for all 1990-91 graduates, 62.9% (n=1,727) completed degree requirements in 9 semesters or fewer, compared to 71.3% of those not requiring remediation and 51.8% of those who enrolled in at least one college preparatory class; and (5) between 1990-91 and 1995-96, the percentage of graduates requiring remediation who took 13 or more semesters to graduate increased from 16.8% to 27.3%. (HAA)

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RESEARCH BRIEF

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A COMPARISON OF SPJC GRADUATES 1995-96 VS. 1990-91

In September 1991 a study was conducted (Research Brief, Volume 1 Number 2) to learn whether or not students in need of remediation completed their degree programs and, if they did, in how many semesters were they enrolled from first attendance to degree award. The academic records of students who graduated from St. Petersburg Junior College at the end of the 1990-91 reporting year (summer session 1990, fall session 1990, and spring session 1991) were analyzed so that the following questions could be answered:

- How many students graduated in the reporting year?
- How many students had taken one or more college preparatory classes?
- How many semesters did the majority of students attend the college in order to complete the degree requirements?
- Was there a difference for the majority of students in the number of semesters needed to complete the A.A. degree compared to the A.S. degree?
- What was the effect of participation in college preparatory classes on the number of semesters needed to complete degree requirements?

Various diverse factors led to the 1990-91 study. Among them were emphasis on educational accountability, the calls for institutional effectiveness which mandated the development of student tracking systems whose cost of maintenance was largely dependent upon the number of years student cohorts would be tracked on computer mainframes, and tentative state support for colleges for a number of years. Thus, it was obligatory for colleges to examine the acceptability of students not prepared for college work.

Since the original study, additional degree and curriculum changes, as well as funding incentives, have occurred that once again make it important for the college to examine the success of students requiring remediation in terms of meeting degree requirements. The number of hours required for the A.A. degree has been reduced from 64 credits to 60 credits; many A.S. degree credit requirements have been reduced as well.

Two incentive funding programs -- Program Based Incentive Funding and Program Based Budgeting -- have been established statewide which reward colleges for degree completers, especially successful completers who required remediation. Innovative curriculum changes have occurred to enhance student success, especially in remedial classes. The current study examined students completing degree requirements in the 1995-96 reporting year (summer session 1995, fall session 1995, spring session 1996) in terms of the same questions (above) and compared the results to the 1990-91 study.

Findings

As a community college, St. Petersburg Junior College adheres to the open door policy, accepting students with high school diplomas and GED's without regard to their actual preparation. In 1990 approximately two-thirds of the students were part-time attendees, enrolling for fewer than 12 semester hours during the fall and spring sessions, or fewer than nine semester hours during the summer session. This remained true in 1995; in fact, the percentage of part-time attendees was slightly higher.

There were slightly more graduates (3.5%) receiving the A.A./A.S. degrees in the 1990-91 reporting year than in 1995-96 (2,745 vs. 2,652). This was not surprising since the college has experienced decreasing enrollments in recent years. The majority of graduates in both years received the A.A. degree (1,772 or 64.6% in 1990-91; 1,864 or 70.3% in 1995-96). This is similar to the distribution of the annual unduplicated headcount wherein the number of students studying for the A.A. degree is greater than those enrolled in A.S. degree programs.

More of the students who graduated in 1995-96 (1,414 or 53.3%) had enrolled in one or more college preparatory classes during their tenure at SPJC than had those who graduated in 1990-91 (1,183 or 43.1%). Table 1 shows the number of graduates by degree earned and participation in remediation. The overall percentage of students who were remediated was greater in 1995-96 than in 1990-91. Nevertheless, the fact that more students in the group receiving the AA. degree were remediated than in the group of students receiving the A.S. degree (45.3% vs. 39.1% in 1990-91 compared to 54.9% vs. 49.5% in 1995-96) remained true. While it continues to be gratifying that students who come to SPJC in need of remediation can be successful in terms of degree completion, this study did not address the number of students who enroll in but never complete college preparatory classes.

TABLE I
NUMBER OF GRADUATES WHO WERE/WERE NOT REMEDIATED
BY DEGREE AWARDED

Semester Graduated	A. A. Degree		A.S. Degree	
	Remediation	No Remediation	Remediation	No Remediation
1990-91				
Session 3 '90	251	267	73	99
Session 1 '90	244	290	143	248
Session 2 '91	308	412	164	246
Total	803	969	380	593
Percent	45.3%	54.7%	39.1%	61.0%
Total by Degree		1772		973
1995-96				
Session 3 '95	270	220	45	38
Session 1 '95	299	190	138	142
Session 2 '96	455	430	207	218
Total	1024	840	390	398
Percent	54.9%	45.1%	49.5%	50.5%
Total by Degree		1864		788

The majority of students (1,727 or 62.9% in 1990-91; 1,576 or 59.4% in 1995-96), whether or not they had taken college preparatory classes and without regard to full-time/part-time attendance or degree earned, completed the degree requirements in nine semesters of attendance or less. Among students who had not required college preparatory classes about three-fourths (71.3% in 1990-91; 75.3% in 1995-96) completed the degree requirements in nine semesters or less. In the 1990-91 study about one-half (49.7%) of the students not requiring remediation graduated in six semesters or less; in 1995-96 about two-fifths (38.9%) graduated in six semesters or less. This percentage reduction may reflect the gradual increase in the percentage of students attending SPJC on a part-time basis. However, it was interesting to note a significant difference by degree in the percentage of non-remediated students who graduated in six semesters or less. In 1990-91 over one-half (55.7%) of A. S. degree graduates met this criteria compared to less than one-third (32.7%) in 1995-96. This compares to 46.0% in 1990-91 and 41.8% in 1995-96 for A. A. degree graduates. The data reflects semesters of actual enrollment by students.

Among students who had enrolled in college preparatory classes, about one-half (51.8% in 1990-91; 45.5% in 1995-96) completed the degree requirements in nine semesters or less. In 1990-91 more than four-fifths (83.2%) of students who were remediated graduated in 12 semesters or less; in 1995-96 almost three-fourths (72.7%) of these students completed in the same time. Table 2 shows the number of semesters of actual student enrollment to receipt of degree by remediation status.

TABLE 2
NUMBER OF SEMESTERS ENROLLED TO COMPLETE DEGREE REQUIREMENTS
BY REMEDIATION STATUS

		Number of Semesters							
		<u>6 or less</u>		<u>7 - 9</u>		<u>10-12</u>		<u>13 or more</u>	
		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
<u>1990-91</u>									
A.A. Degree									
Remediation		179	22.3%	253	31.5%	249	31.0%	122	15.2%
No Remediation		446	46.0%	262	27.9%	178	18.4%	83	8.6%
A.S. Degree									
Remediation		109	28.7%	72	19.0%	122	32.1%	77	20.3%
No Remediation		330	55.7%	76	12.8%	104	17.5%	83	14.0%
Total									
Remediation		288	24.3%	325	27.5%	371	31.4%	199	16.8%
No Remediation		776	49.7%	338	21.6%	282	18.1%	166	10.6%
<u>1995-96</u>									
A.A. Degree									
Remediation		191	18.7%	369	36.0%	248	24.2%	216	21.1%
No Remediation		351	41.8%	322	38.3%	103	12.3%	64	7.6%
A.S. Degree									
Remediation		10	2.6%	74	19.0%	136	34.9%	170	43.6%
No Remediation		130	32.7%	129	32.4%	71	17.8%	68	17.1%
Total									
Remediation		201	14.2%	443	31.3%	384	27.2%	386	27.3%
No Remediation		481	38.9%	451	36.4%	174	14.1%	132	10.7%

Since the majority of students complete degree requirements in nine (9) semesters or less, it seemed appropriate to compare by degree and remediation status, the percentages of students graduating in each study. With one exception, there seemed to be little change in the percentages of students graduating in nine semesters or less by degree and remediation status. For those students receiving the A.A. degree, more than one-half (53.8%) of students who were remediated, and about three-fourths (73.5%) of the students who were not remediated graduated in nine semesters of attendance or less in 1990-91; in 1995-96 these percentages were 54.7% and 80.1%, respectively. For those students receiving the A.S. degree about two-thirds (68.5% in 1990-91; 65.1% in 1995-96) who were not remediated graduated in nine semesters of attendance or less. However, almost one-half (47.7%) of the students who were remediated and received the A.S. degree in 1990-91 completed degree requirements in nine semesters or less compared to less than one-fourth (21.6%) in 1995-96.

Overall, in each study about one-tenth (10.6% in 1990-91; 10.7% in 1995-96) of students not requiring remediation took 13 or more semesters of attendance to complete degree requirements. More A.S. degree graduates (14% in 1990-91; 17.1% in 1995-96) than A.A. degree graduates (8.6% in 1990-91; 7.6% in 1995-96) required this time length. Among students requiring remediation the percentage who attended SPJC 13 or more semesters was not only higher (than those who were not remediated) but increased from less than one-fifth (16.8%) in 1990-91 to more than one-fourth (27.3%) in 1995-96. Again, more A.S. degree graduates (20.3% in 1990-91; 43.6% in 1995-96) than A.A. degree graduates (15.2% in 1990-91; 21.1% in 1995-96) required this time length. Recall that, in general, the number of credits in A.S. degree programs is greater than the number of credits in the A.A. degree program and this may affect the time length to degree.

SUMMARY

Students who come to SPJC in need of remediation can be successful and can complete their degree programs. This was true in 1990-91 and remained true in 1995-96.

Nevertheless, there were some differences between the graduates in each study. Even though there were slightly more graduates in 1990-91 than in 1995-96, more students who graduated in 1995-96 had participated in one or more college preparatory classes than those who graduated in 1990-91. This was true regardless of the degree earned.

Slightly less than 90% of the graduates who had not required remediation completed degree requirements within four years (12 semesters) of attendance. In contrast about 83% of 1990-91 students in need of remediation completed degree requirements in this time frame compared to about 73% in 1995-96. Additionally, slightly less than 50% of the students not requiring remediation in 1990-91 completed degree requirements in six semesters or less. In 1995-96 this percentage decreased to less than 40%. Thus, even though the number of hours in many degree programs have been reduced, students appeared to be attending more semesters to complete degree requirements in 1995-96.

On the other hand, since more graduates are participating in remedial courses, the college is accomplishing the goals of the statewide incentive funding programs which reward all degree completions but provide additional incentives when graduates were remediated. Curriculum changes, especially in remedial courses, may be affecting the success of students in need of remediation in a positive manner. This can be determined through cohort tracking. Finally, the completion timeline, as well as the number of remediated graduates, have important implications for the length of time student tracking systems should follow student cohorts.